Families Provide Caregiving Support for Older Adults

As his two visiting grandsons run through the house playing ball, Raymond, 65, assists his 90-year-old mother, Fannie, who has Alzheimer's disease, into the house. His 8-year-old grandson runs to him with a big hug, saying, "Pop-pop, you brought Granny home!" Then Raymond returns to the car to bring his wife's aunt. He pulls her wheelchair on top of a ramp from the garage into the house.

Meanwhile, his wife, Lucille, 60, talks with her daughter, 31, while preparing a pureed dinner for her aunt, a soft-texture meal for her mother-in-law, and a low-cholesterol dinner for herself and Raymond. As Lucille's aunt enters the house, she smiles at her 2-year-old great nephew, but she cannot speak because she had a stroke last summer. Such is a typical evening at the Tillery household.

Raymond and Lucille Tillery's roles as caregivers are becoming increasingly common. Families, not social service agencies, nursing homes, or government programs, are the mainstay of long-term care for older persons in the United States according to the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services Administration on Aging. More than 22.4 million U.S. households are serving in family caregiving roles for persons over the age of 50, and that number will increase rapidly as the population ages and as medical science continues to extend life.

Both Lucille's aunt and Raymond's mother live with them in their four-bedroom home in a suburb of Columbus, Ohio. When Raymond and Lucille Tillery initially became caregivers in 1985, they both were working full-time, rearing a teenage daughter at home, and supporting a son in a private out-of-state college. These dual roles of caring for children and parents make the Tillerys part of the "sandwich generation."

According to projections by the National

Alliance for Caregiving, by 2007, the total number of employed caregivers in the United States is expected to increase to nearly 15.6 million working Americans–roughly one in ten employed workers.

Fortunately the Tillerys rarely had to take time off of work to care for Fannie because the Heritage Day Health Center provides care for her from 7:30 a.m. until 5:30 p.m. on weekdays. Adult day care centers provide care and companionship for older persons who need assistance or supervision during the day. The program offers relief to family members or caregivers and allows them the freedom to go to work, handle personal business, or just relax while knowing their relative is well cared for and safe. Approximately 150,000 older Americans use the more than 3,500 adult care programs, according to the National Adult Day Services Association.

"Heritage Center has been a godsend,"

Lucille says. "Without it, I wouldn't have any free time at all during the week. Last year, when my great-aunt started living with us, Heritage Center also accepted her into the program."

Some caregivers do not have to provide full-time care but might perform a few caregiving tasks for a senior such as providing transportation, taking out the garbage, or performing some household duties. "I provide transportation to and from my mother's doctor's appointments and help her with household duties," says Joanne Bakewell, a former psychiatric nurse who cares for her mother who is in the beginning stages of Alzheimer's disease. "I worry constantly about her and check on her often."

The 2001 AARP Caregiver Identification Study found that of the 34% of respondents who were caregivers, 19% thought of themselves as caregivers, while fifteen percent did not identify themselves as caregivers even though they were. The transition from recognizing one's role as a caregiver to actually assisting with personal care, including the most intimate aspects of personal hygiene, can be extremely challenging. "I became more like the parent," Raymond recalls. "I had never seen my mother undressed beyond her slip, and now I was having to wash her private parts. It was very difficult, but I tried to look at it as being more like a nurse or doctor. I felt proud I could do it because she had helped me so much in my life."

Often this transition makes caregivers recognize a need for assistance and begin to seek and use formal services. Through the National Aging Services Network of

To prevent caregivers' exhaustion and stress, the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services Administration on Aging recommends four survival tips:

1. **Plan ahead and learn about available resources.**
2. **Develop contingency plans and accept help.**
3. **Take one day at a time and pay close attention to your own health by getting enough rest, making time for leisure, and being good to yourself.**
4. **Share your feelings with others.**

federal, state, and local agencies, services and support such as information and assistance, case management, adult day care, transportation, home health care, home-delivered meals, personal care services, and other services are provided to older Americans and those who care for them.

"Before we moved my mother-in-law to live with us," explains Lucille, "we called the area agency on aging to look for an adult day care center. The [Central Ohio Area Agency on Aging] gave me a list of local day care providers and we found a perfect match."

To address the unique needs of caregivers, the National Family Caregiver Support Program was enacted in 2000 as a part of the Older Americans Act. This program provides funding to the network for informational services, assistance in obtaining services, counseling and training services, respite care, and supplemental services.

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As the nation celebrates Older Americans Month (OAM) this May, you can learn more about these and other programs by visiting www.aoa.gov. This year's OAM theme— "What We Do Makes a Difference"— highlights the critical roles each of us play in our own older years and those of others. For information about what resources are available locally, contact the Eldercare Locator at 1-800-677-1116 or visit www.eldercare.gov.